

The Arts

When Kanwal Sibal, the Indian Ambassador to Russia, was looking for a way to mark the 60th Anniversary of India-Russia diplomatic relations, he turned to his old friend the Indian Contemporary Arts Ambassador, Ravi Kumar. Mr. Kumar, like Ambassador Sibal, has been decorated by former French President Jacques Chirac as Chevaliers de l'Ordre du Merite Nationale. Mr. Kumar is a publisher and an exhibition curator, having organized exhibitions of Indian art around the globe during the last four decades. He has become a recognized figure in the international art scene.

The result of Mr. Kumar's efforts was a magnificent, month-long exhibition of Indian contemporary art called India 25. Under the aegis of the Russian Academy of Arts, the exhibit was at the Tsereteli Gallery, and a lavish book, with the same title, was distributed by the embassy.

"This exhibition of 25 artists is like human life that goes through many ages. While it contains moody intentions in abstraction, it celebrates and explores the seasons of Indian sensibility through these 25 artists. Human life, like art, is dual in nature. One part is man's conscious life and the other part is the subconscious," Kumar wrote in a preface to the book.

Russia and India have had a long history of cultural ties since the days of the artist and philosopher Nicholas Roerich, who with his wife founded the Agni Yoga Society and traveled extensively throughout the Indian Himalayans painting landscapes and portraits before his death in the Punjab in 1947.

The works of the 25 artists selected for this exhibition portray very different temperaments and styles, reflecting the diversity of Indian art today.

The exuberant tropical landscapes with red-tiled houses that celebrate a fantasy paradise by Kerala-born Murli Nagpuzha are in stark contrast with the somber works on display from fellow Keralan, Yusuf Arakal.

Baba Anand utilizes vintage oleographs of Krishna and other Hindu deities decorated with sequins, crystals, gold and silver dust and displayed in highly decorated mattes using flowers and other unusual three-dimensional objects.

The 85-year old S. H. Raza, who lives in Paris, has progressed from early expressionist landscapes to the iconic "Bindhu" style he is now most famous for – sacred in its symbolism and mystical with an aura of the metaphysical.

Shanta Rao, one of four women artists in the show (the others are Arpana Caur, Sarab Soni and Sangeeta Gupta) uses the unusual medium of inkjet printing on canvas. "In my recent works, I explore the ruses of representation by using my own body as a building block of imagery, many-shaped body, autobiographical, make-believe, and even archetypal," says Shanta.

The book, published by Ravi Kumar, will be a beautiful addition to many coffee tables in Moscow.